Social Technologies are Defocusing: Applying Process Thinking to Information & Innovation

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[1]

SUMMARY

- America was the global manufacturing leader.
- Process & Productivity were paramount.
- Social technologies are defocusing.
- We need to apply process thinking to information and innovation.

Necessity is the mother of Invention. – Anonymous.

Rise and Fall of American Manufacturing

Many consider the invention of the assembly line at the beginning of the 20th century the dawning moment for American manufacturing; marking the beginning of our love affair with finding more efficient and effective ways of executing work. Over the next 60 years, including a depression, two world wars, and a number of economic downturns, drove and helped to perfect the practice of driving down costs, removing waste, and optimizing through-put to maximize profits and ultimately ‘win’ in the global market place. What we call Lean Six Sigma in today's vernacular.

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Then the 80's happened. Beyond the big hair and classic music, America's global dominance in manufacturing was being challenged. Taught by Dr. W. Edward Deming, Japanese manufacturers learned quality methods such as statistical process control and experienced previously unheard of levels of quality and productivity. Over the next 20 years, American automakers scrambled to create products that could compete with Japanese automobiles. Depending on who you talk to, some would say they are still striving to do so.

Woe to the Information Worker

In July, 2012; McKinsey & Co. published a study regarding 'The Social Economy' [2] that found the average American spends well over 50% of their professionally focused time reading or communicating, and just under 40% of their time actually doing work.

Imagine it's 1930, and we just introduced Twitter to America's manufacturing workers to help them be more focused and productive. It's ridiculous!

Social technologies have decayed our abilities to focus. In McKinsey's study, a person spends ~30% of their time reading or responding to email. That's 12 out of every 40 hours in a work week for every employee in your organization. It doesn't take long for that to add up to real money.

Most 'experts' think we need more social networks, more collaboration opportunities. That would be like asking manufacturing workers to spend more time talking to each other and in meetings rather than focused on producing. Every manufacturing manager I've met would agree that we need to talk to each other, however, they also recognize the time in conversation is time away from production. So they opt to limit the conversation time.

A New Way of Thinking...

Imagine if each employee in every organization was asked to spend 80% of their time working and 20% communicating? They could opt of meetings that had no agenda without fear. They could limit their email time to less than an hour a day. They could ignore Instant Messages when they weren't actively collaborating - or solving a problem.

Imagine if they could focus on their work at their work center where they have everything they need, when they need it. They could immediately and visually see how they're doing. What they needed to work on was clearly outlined and they could track their progress.

In manufacturing there are methods such as Standard Work, Visual Management, 5S, Hoshin Planning, TWI, and others that help that industry maximize productivity. We think those methods can be applied more widely to other industries. They are emerging; but too slowly - America needs the leaders and the workers to demand better processes, better organization and better tools. Not just more tools...

Otherwise what makes America a leader today will pass to others as it has in manufacturing.

- IT Management [3]
- Performance Management [4]
- Quality Excellence [5]

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